



# One Thousand Dollars

Short Story by O. HENRY

“Now, what can a man possibly do with a thousand dollars?”

### Connect to Your Life

**Instant Wealth** Many people dream about inheriting a large sum of money because they like to imagine how extra money would improve their lives. If you were to inherit a significant amount of money, what would be a responsible way of spending it? What ways might be less responsible? How might your choices affect your life? Compare your answers with those of your classmates.

## Build Background

**New York, New York** A city of contrasts, New York City at the beginning of the 1900s was a bustling center of 4 million people. While many people struggled to make a living, the wealthy few lived a life of leisure and were often more concerned about their social standing than the plight of the less fortunate. In 1906, O. Henry published a collection of short stories set entirely in New York City. He titled his work *The Four Million* because he was convinced that everyone in the city, rich or poor, had a story worth telling.

The following selection, set in New York City during this era, opens just as the main character has inherited \$1,000 from his wealthy uncle. This sum of money would have bought much more in 1900 than it would today. For example, a new car in 1900 cost about \$600, while a newspaper and a glass of cola each cost about 5 cents. The average industrial worker earned only about \$490 for an entire year of labor; a postal worker earned about 37 cents an hour.

### WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

acquaint	pendant
disreputable	precariousness
encumber	prudent
expenditure	stipulate
genially	venerable

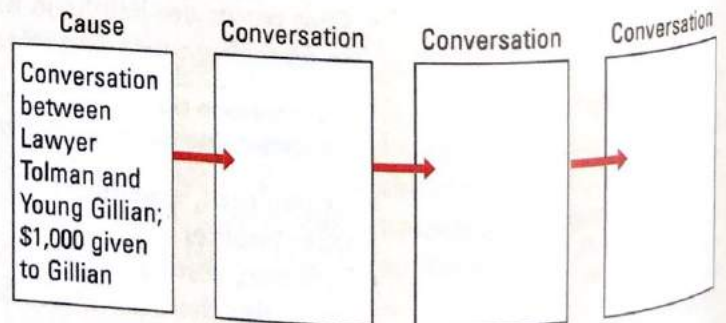
## Focus Your Reading

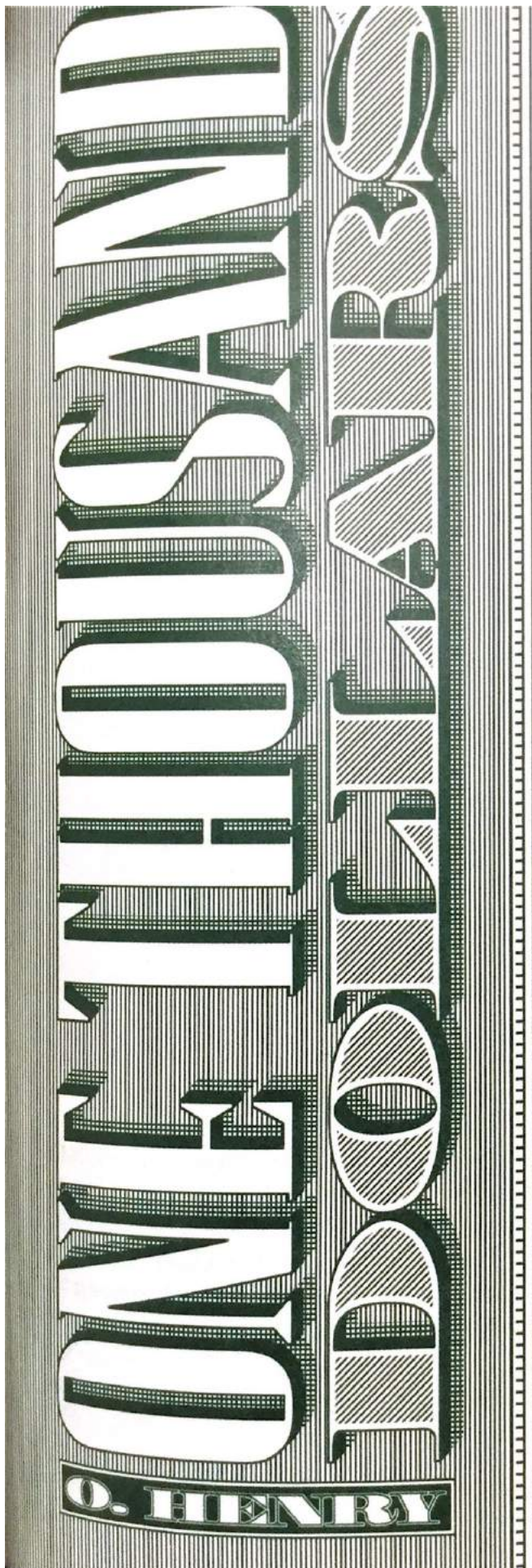
**LITERARY ANALYSIS PLOT** The **plot**, or the sequence of related events in a story, usually follows a pattern. It begins with the **exposition**, in which important background information is given. Next, during the **rising action**, the **characters** and **conflict** are developed. This leads to the **climax**, or the **turning point** of the action. The **falling action** consists of events that occur after the climax.

As you read this story, notice how the plot advances in stages, with every event contributing to the main character's decision about what to do with his money.

**ACTIVE READING CAUSE AND EFFECT** Events in a plot are often related by **cause and effect**. One event in the story can cause another, which is the effect. The effect may in turn cause another event, and so on.

**READER'S NOTEBOOK** The events in this story unfold through a series of related conversations, with each one leading directly to the next. Create a graphic like the one started below to give a brief summary of each conversation and to show how the conversations are related.





**“One thousand dollars,”**

**repeated Lawyer Tolman,**

**solemnly and severely,**

**“and here is the money.”**

**Young Gillian**

**gave a decidedly amused**

**laugh as he fingered**

**the thin package of new**

**fifty-dollar notes.**

It's such a confoundedly awkward amount," he explained, genially, to the lawyer. "If it had been ten thousand a fellow might wind up with a lot of fireworks and do himself credit. Even \$50 would have been less trouble."

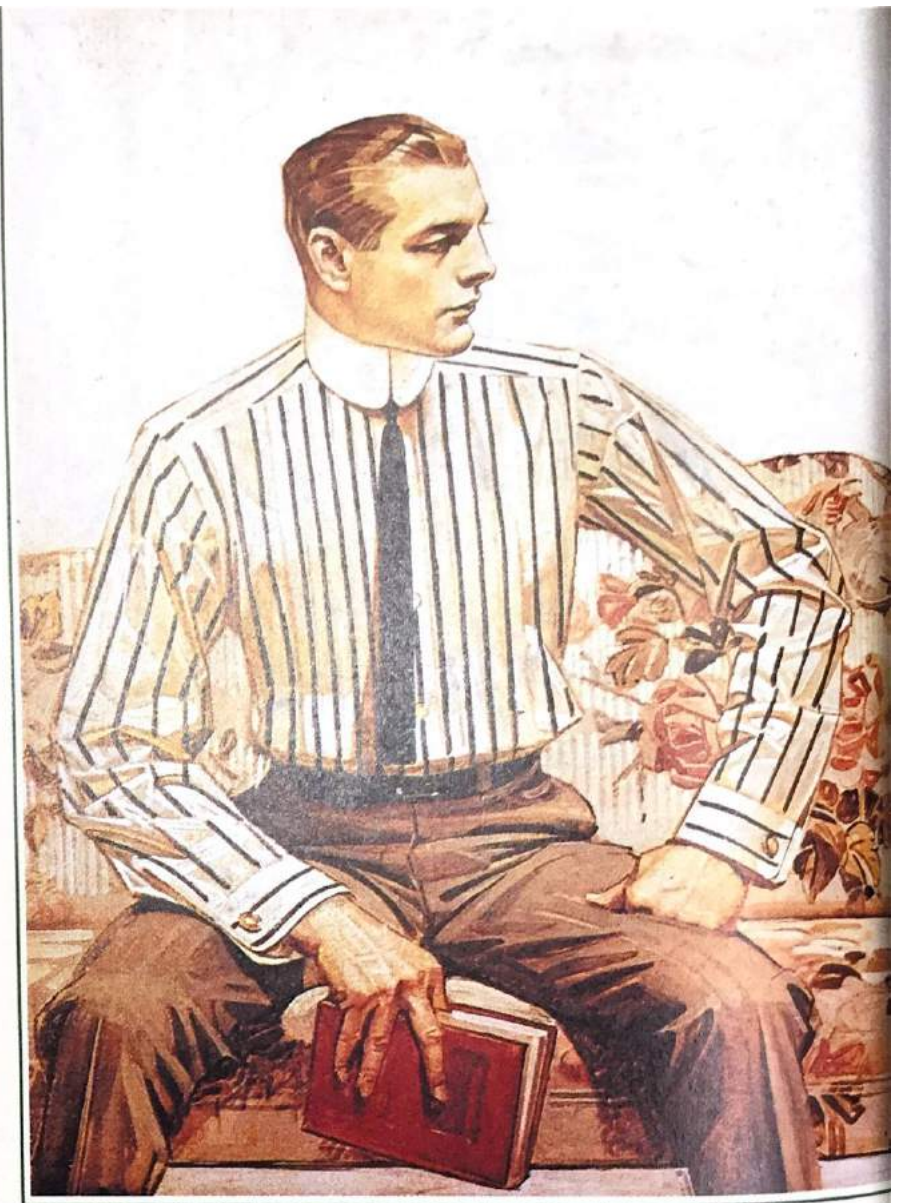
"You heard the reading of your uncle's will," continued Lawyer Tolman, professionally dry in his tones. "I do not know if you paid much attention to its details. I must remind you of one. You are required to render to us an account of the manner of expenditure of this \$1,000 as soon as you have disposed of it. The will stipulates that. I trust that you will so far comply with the late Mr. Gillian's wishes."

"You may depend upon it," said the young man, politely, "in spite of the extra expense it will entail. I may have to engage a secretary. I was never good at accounts."

Gillian thrust the package of notes into his coat pocket and went to his club. There he hunted out one whom he called Old Bryson.

Old Bryson was calm and forty and sequestered.<sup>1</sup> He was in a corner reading a book, and when he saw Gillian approaching he sighed, laid down his book and took off his glasses.

"Old Bryson, wake up," said Gillian. "I've a funny story to tell you."



"I wish you would tell it to some one in the billiard-room," said Old Bryson. "You know how I hate your stories."

"This is a better one than usual," said Gillian, rolling a cigarette; "and I'm going to tell it to you. It's too sad and funny to go with

1. **sequestered**: solitary; alone.

WORDS TO KNOW **genially** (jēn'yə-lē) *adv.* in a friendly manner  
**expenditure** (ĭk-spēn'də-chər) *n.* an act of spending  
**stipulate** (stĭp'yə-lăt') *v.* to state as a condition; specify



Courtesy Cluett, Peabody & Co., Inc.

the rattling of billiard balls. I've just come from my late uncle's firm of legal corsairs.<sup>2</sup> He leaves me an even thousand dollars. [Now, what can a man possibly do with a thousand dollars?]

"I thought," said Old Bryson, showing as much interest as a bee shows in a vinegar cruet, "that the late Septimas Gillian was worth something like half a million."

"He was," assented Gillian, joyously, "and that's where the joke comes in. He's left his

whole cargo of doubloons to a microbe. That is, part of it goes to the man who invents a new bacillus<sup>3</sup> and the rest to establish a hospital for doing away with it again. There are one or two trifling bequests on the side. The butler and the housekeeper get a seal ring and \$10 each. His nephew gets \$1,000."

"You've always had plenty of money to spend," observed Old Bryson.

"Tons," said Gillian. "Uncle was the fairy godmother as far as an allowance was concerned."

"Any other heirs?" asked Old Bryson.

"None." Gillian frowned at his cigarette and kicked the upholstered leather of a divan uneasily. "There is a Miss Hayden, a ward of my uncle, who lived in his house. She's a quiet thing—musical—the daughter of somebody who was unlucky enough to be his friend. I forgot to say that she was in on the seal ring and \$10 joke, too. I

wish I had been. Then I could have had two bottles of brut,<sup>4</sup> tipped the waiter with the ring and had the whole business off my hands. Don't be superior and insulting, old Bryson—tell me what a fellow can do with a thousand dollars."

2. corsairs (kôr'sârz'): pirates.

3. bacillus (bâ-sîl'əs): bacterium.

4. brut (brōöt): very dry (that is, not sweet) champagne.

Old Bryson rubbed his glasses and smiled. And when Old Bryson smiled Gillian knew that he intended to be more offensive than ever. [“A thousand dollars,” he said, “means much or little.”] One man may buy a happy home with it and laugh at Rockefeller.<sup>5</sup> Another could send his wife South with it and save her life. A thousand dollars would buy pure milk for one hundred babies during June, July, and August and save fifty of their lives. You could count upon a half hour’s diversion with it at faro<sup>6</sup> in one of the fortified art galleries. It would furnish an education to an ambitious boy. I am told that a genuine Corot<sup>7</sup> was secured for that amount in an auction room yesterday. You could move to a New Hampshire town and live respectably for two years on it.

“You could rent Madison Square Garden for one evening with it, and lecture your audience, if you should have one, on the precariousness of the profession of heir presumptive.”<sup>8</sup>

“People might like you, Old Bryson,” said Gillian, always unruffled, “if you wouldn’t moralize. I asked you to tell me what I could do with a thousand dollars.”

“You?” said Bryson, with a gentle laugh, “Why, Bobby Gillian, there’s only one logical thing you could do. You can go buy Miss Lotta Lauriere a diamond pendant with the money, and then take yourself off to Idaho and inflict your presence upon a ranch. I advise a sheep ranch, as I have a particular dislike for sheep.”

#### ACTIVE READING

**QUESTION** How do you think Old Bryson feels about Gillian?

“Thanks,” said Gillian, rising. “I thought I could depend on you, Old Bryson. You’ve hit on the very scheme. I wanted to chuck the money in a lump, for I’ve got to turn in an account for it, and I hate itemizing.”

Gillian phoned for a cab and said to the driver: “The stage entrance of the Columbine Theatre.”

Miss Lotta Lauriere was assisting nature with a powder puff, almost ready for her call at a crowded matinee, when her dresser mentioned the name of Mr. Gillian.

“Let it in,” said Miss Lauriere. “Now, what is it, Bobby? I’m going on in two minutes.”

“Rabbit-foot your right ear a little,” suggested Gillian, critically. “That’s better. It won’t take two minutes for me. What do you say to a little thing in the pendant line. I can stand three ciphers<sup>9</sup> with a figure in front of ’em.”

“Oh, just as you say,” carolled Miss Lauriere. “My right glove, Adams. Say, Bobby, did you see that necklace Della Stacey had on the other night? Two thousand two hundred dollars it cost at Tiffany’s. But, of course—pull my sash a little to the left, Adams.”

“Miss Lauriere for the opening chorus!” cried the call boy without.

Gillian strolled out to where his cab was waiting.

“What would you do with a thousand dollars if you had it?” he asked the driver.

“Open a s’loon,” said the cabby promptly and huskily. “I know a place I could take money in with both hands. It’s a four-story brick on a corner. I’ve got it figured out. Second story . . . chop suey; third floor—manicures and foreign missions; fourth floor—pool-room. If you was thinking of putting up the cap”—

“Oh, no,” said Gillian, “I merely asked from curiosity. I take you by the hour. Drive till I tell you to stop.”

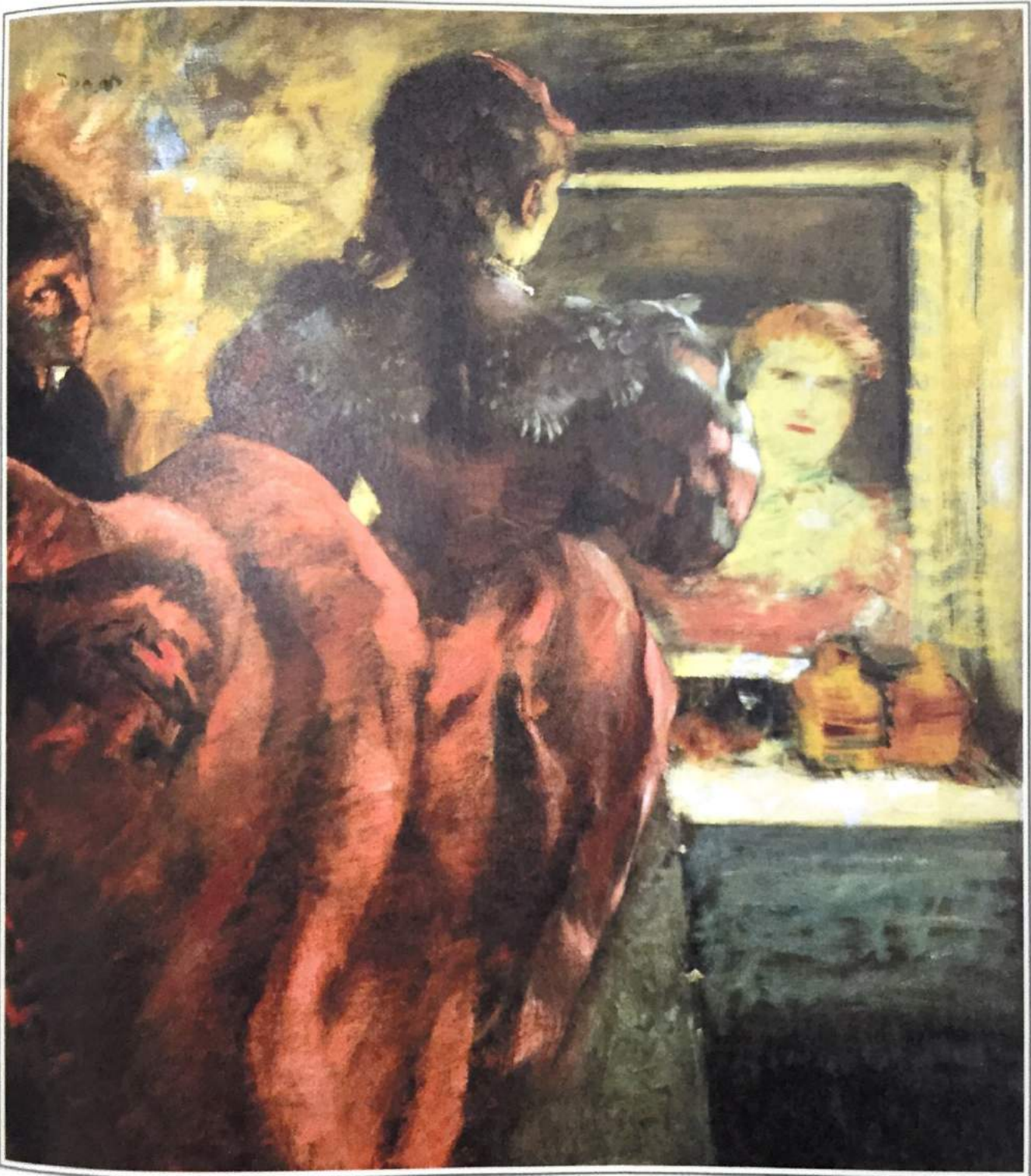
5. **Rockefeller:** John D. Rockefeller, who built a great oil-refining corporation in the late 1800s and became the first American billionaire.

6. **faro** (fār’ō): a gambling game played with cards.

7. **Corot** (kô-rō’): painting by Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, a 19th-century French artist known for his landscapes.

8. **heir** (âr) **presumptive:** one who is expected to inherit the estate of another.

9. **ciphers** (sī’fərz): zeroes.



*Femme à sa Toilette* [Actress in her dressing room] (about 1879), Edgar Degas.  
Oil on canvas, 33 1/4" x 29 1/4". The Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena, California.

Eight blocks down Broadway Gillian poked up the trap<sup>10</sup> with his cane and got out. A blind man sat upon a stool on the sidewalk selling pencils. Gillian went out and stood before him.

"Excuse me," he said, "but would you mind telling me what you would do if you had a thousand dollars?"

"You got out of that cab that just drove up, didn't you?" asked the blind man.

"I did," said Gillian.

"I guess you are all right," said the pencil dealer, "to ride in a cab by daylight. Take a look at that, if you like."

He drew a small book from his coat pocket and held it out. Gillian opened it and saw that it was a bank deposit book. It showed a balance of \$1,785 to the blind man's credit.

Gillian returned the book and got into the cab.

"I forgot something," he said. "You may drive to the law offices of Tolman & Sharp, at —, Broadway."

Lawyer Tolman looked at him hostilely and inquiringly through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I beg your pardon," said Gillian cheerfully, "but may I ask you a question? It is not an impertinent<sup>11</sup> one, I am sure. Was Miss Hayden left anything by my uncle's will besides the ring and the \$10?"

#### ACTIVE READING

##### CAUSE AND EFFECT

What do you think caused Gillian to return to the lawyer's office?

gave the driver the address of his late uncle's home.

Miss Hayden was writing letters in the library. She was small and slender and clothed in black. But you would have noticed her eyes. Gillian drifted in with his air of regarding the world as inconsequent.<sup>12</sup>

"I've just come from old Tolman's," he explained. "They've been going over the papers down there. They found a"—Gillian searched his memory for a legal term—"they found an amendment or a postscript or something to the will. It seems that the

old boy loosened up a little on second thoughts and willed you a thousand dollars. I was driving up this way and Tolman asked me to bring you the money. Here it is. You'd better count it to see if it's right." Gillian laid the money beside her hand on the desk.

Miss Hayden turned white. "Oh!" she said, and again "Oh!" Gillian half turned and looked out the window.

"I suppose, of course," he said, in a low voice, "that you know I love you."

"I am sorry," said Miss Hayden, taking up her money.

"There is no use?" asked Gillian, almost light-heartedly.

"I am sorry," she said again.

"May I write a note?" asked Gillian, with a smile. He seated himself at the big library table. She supplied him with paper and pen, and then went back to her secretaire.<sup>13</sup>

Gillian made out his account of his expenditure of the thousand dollars in these words:

#### ACTIVE READING

**CLARIFY** What do these comments reveal about Gillian's feelings toward Miss Hayden?

"Paid by the black sheep, Robert Gillian, \$1,000 on the account of eternal happiness, owed by Heaven to the best and dearest woman on earth."

Gillian slipped his writing into an envelope, bowed and went his way.

His cab stopped again at the office of Tolman & Sharp.

"I have expended the thousand dollars," he said, cheerily, to Tolman of the gold glasses, "and I have come to render account of it, as I agreed. There is quite a feeling of summer in the air—do you not think so, Mr. Tolman?" He tossed a white envelope on the lawyer's table. "You will find there a memorandum, sir, of the

10. **poked up the trap**: pushed open the door in the roof of the cab (to tell the driver that he wanted to stop).

11. **impertinent**: rude.

12. **inconsequent**: unimportant.

13. **secretaire** (sĕk'rĕ-târ'): a desk with a small bookcase on top.

modus operandi<sup>14</sup> of the vanished dollars.”

Without touching the envelope, Mr. Tolman went to a door and called his partner, Sharp. Together they explored the caverns of the immense safe. Forth they dragged as trophy of their search a big envelope sealed with wax. This they forcibly invaded, and wagged their venerable heads together over its contents. Then Tolman became spokesman.

“Mr. Gillian,” he said, formally, “there was a codicil<sup>15</sup> to your uncle’s will. It was intrusted to us privately, with instructions that it be not opened until you furnished us with a full account of your handling of the \$1,000 bequest in the will. As you have fulfilled the conditions my partner and I have read the codicil. I do not wish to encumber your understanding with its legal phraseology, but I will acquaint you with the spirit of its contents.

“The codicil promises that in the event that your disposition of the \$1,000 demonstrates that you possess any of the qualifications that deserve reward, much benefit will accrue to you. Mr. Sharp and I are named as the judges, and I assure you that we will do our duty strictly according to justice—with liberality.<sup>16</sup> We are not at all unfavorably disposed toward you, Mr. Gillian. But let us return the letter of the codicil. If your disposal of the money in question has been prudent, wise, or unselfish, it is in our power to hand you over bonds to the value of \$50,000 which have been placed in our hands for that purpose. But if—as our client, the late Mr. Gillian, explicitly provides—you have used this money as you have used money in the past—I quote the late Mr. Gillian—in reprehensible dissipation<sup>17</sup> among disreputable associates—the \$50,000 is to be paid to Miriam Hayden, ward of the late Mr. Gillian, without delay. Now, Mr. Gillian, Mr. Sharp and I will examine your account in regard to the \$1,000. You submit it in writing, I believe. I hope you will repose confidence in our decision.”

Mr. Tolman reached out for the envelope. Gillian was a little the quicker in taking it up. He tore the account and its cover leisurely into strips and dropped them into his pocket.

“It’s all right,” he said, smiling. “There isn’t a bit of need to bother you with this. I don’t suppose you’d understand these itemized bets, anyway. I lost the thousand dollars on the races. Good-day to you, gentlemen.”

Tolman & Sharp shook their heads mournfully at each other when Gillian left, for they heard him whistling gayly in the hallway as he waited for the elevator. ♦

14. **modus operandi** (mō’dəs ɒp’ə-rən’dē): method of functioning.

15. **codicil** (kōd’ə-sīl): a supplement to a will.

16. **liberality** (līb’ə-rāl’ī-tē): generosity.

17. **reprehensible dissipation** (rēp’rī-hən’sə-bəl dīs’ə-pā’shən): shameful loose living.



Detail from an illustration by J. C. Leyendecker (1917). Two oils on canvas, 28" × 21". Photo courtesy of the Archives of the American Illustrators Gallery, New York. Copyright © ASaP of Holderness, NH 03245, U.S.A.

WORDS  
TO  
KNOW

**venerable** (vēn’ər-ə-bəl) *adj.* worthy of respect by virtue of age or dignity  
**encumber** (ēn-kūm’bər) *v.* to burden  
**acquaint** (ə-kwānt’) *v.* to inform; familiarize  
**prudent** (prōōd’nt) *adj.* characterized by good judgment  
**disreputable** (dīs-rēp’yə-tə-bəl) *adj.* having a bad reputation; not respectable



## Literary Analysis


**PLOT** The chain of related events that take place in a story is called the **plot**, which serves as the writer's blueprint for what happens, when it happens, and to whom it happens. Usually, the events of the plot progress because of a **conflict**. Most plots include the following stages:

**Exposition** The exposition lays the groundwork for the plot and provides the reader with essential background information. Characters are introduced, the setting is described, and the plot begins to unfold.

**Rising Action** As the story progresses, **complications** usually arise, causing difficulties for the main characters and making the conflict more difficult to resolve.

**Climax** The climax is the turning point of the action, the moment when interest and intensity reach their peak. The climax usually involves an important event, decision, or discovery that affects the final outcome.

**Falling Action** The falling action consists of the events that occur after the climax. Often the conflict is resolved, and the intensity of action subsides.

**Paired Activity** Again review the graphic that you made in your  **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. Label each conversation in the story, identifying the plot stage in which the conversation falls. For example, the initial conversation between Lawyer Tolman and Gillian belongs in the exposition.

When you have finished, compare your results with those of your classmates.

## Grammar in Context: Verbs and Diction

In “One Thousand Dollars,” young Gillian mocks the lawyer Tolman by speaking to him in a formal tone.

“I **have expended** the thousand dollars, . . . and I **have come to render** account of it, as I **agreed**.”

**Diction**, sometimes called level of language, is an outgrowth of word choice—for instance, a decision to use formal or informal words. Writers vary their diction to suit particular situations. In the passage above, O. Henry created the formal tone partly through the use of carefully chosen verbs. Gillian might have announced, informally, “I spent the money, and here’s how.” But his imitation of the lawyer’s formal diction shows the reader his attitude toward the lawyer.

**WRITING EXERCISE** Rewrite each sentence, changing the diction from formal to informal. Pay special attention to finding a less formal verb.

**Usage Tip:** Make sure each verb agrees with its subject in number.

**Example: Original** The documents stipulate the procedure for making the expenditure.

**Rewritten** The papers explain how to pay the money.

1. You must comply with the totality of the regulation.
2. The elderly gentleman sequestered himself where no personage could discern his presence.
3. You could squander the funds on light entertainmen
4. She is well acquainted with your impolite conduct

**Grammar Handbook** Subject-Verb Agreement, p.1200



### O. Henry

1862–1910

#### Other Works

*The Four Million*

*The Trimmed Lamp and Other*

*Stories of the Four Million*

*Whirligigs*

*The Voice of the City: Further Stories of the Four Million*

**A Writer’s Beginnings** O. Henry was the pen name of William Sydney Porter. Born in Greensboro, North Carolina, he was brought up by his grandmother and aunt after the death of his mother. At age 15, he left school to work as a clerk in his uncle’s drugstore.

**Texas Trouble** In 1882, O. Henry moved to Texas, where he worked as a ranch hand, a clerk, a bookkeeper, a draftsman, a newspaper owner, and a reporter. Eventually, he became a bank teller at the First National Bank in Austin. After leaving this position, he was accused of taking \$5,000 from the bank to cover some of his personal debts. He may have been innocent, but rather than stand trial, he fled to Honduras in Central America. More

than a year later, he did return home to visit his dying wife. He was tried and sent to prison for three years, where he began to write short stories under the pen name O. Henry.

**The Toast of New York City** After his release from prison, O. Henry eventually settled in New York City—his beloved “Bagdad-on-the-Subway”—where he devoted his time and his energies to writing. He had a gift for finding a story in the little details of everyday life, and he often walked around with a notebook, ready to jot down impressions and ideas. As he observed, “There are stories in everything.” O. Henry’s stories, notable for their surprise endings, became even more famous after his death. At the time of his death, he had written over 600 short stories.

### Author Activity

**Tales with a Twist** O. Henry’s short stories often take an intriguing turn at the end. Read at least two other stories of his, such as “The Last Leaf,” “The Gift of the Magi,” or “The Ransom of Red Chief.” Compare the endings of these stories with the ending of “One Thousand Dollars.”